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Chairman: Mr. Mohamad ..... (Sudan)

Contents

Agenda item 35: Questions relating to information (*continued*)

Agenda item 40: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*continued*)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 35: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/62/21 and A/62/205)

1. **Mr. Oraon** (India) said that, in order to be an effective conduit for the flow of information between the United Nations and the world, the Department of Public Information (DPI) must use both modern technologies such as webcasts and cost-effective traditional media such as radio and print, which remained of great importance in the developing world. He welcomed improvements made in the Organization's home pages, the DPI audio library and media-accreditation system, and supported efforts to disseminate information in languages other than the Organization's official languages and to increase local content and involvement in the production of programme material.

2. Given the crucial role played by the United Nations information centres, especially in the developing world, he said that the centres should be strengthened. While the suggested "hub and spoke" model might have appeal in certain managerial contexts, it made little sense in a people-intensive sector such as the media where local sensitivities and regional variations needed to be taken into account. He hoped the workshop for information centres in Asia and the Pacific to be held in January 2008 in Bangkok would make a contribution to meeting the information challenges of the future.

3. He applauded the Department's efforts to provide information that was relevant and meaningful as well as interesting and entertaining and to cover the entire gamut of the Organization's activities. More attention should however be paid to the Organization's most significant activities, such as peacekeeping. The Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations should collaborate to increase awareness of peacekeeping activities and success stories, in order to generate goodwill and improve the image of the United Nations and its peacekeepers. The Department should also play a more active role in rebutting stories based on unverified or distorted information intended to cast United Nations peacekeepers in a negative light.

4. He commended the Department for the first observance of the International Day of Non-Violence on 2 October 2007, the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. It should do more to disseminate the message of non-violence worldwide.

5. **Mr. Adhikari** (Nepal) said that, while the developed countries had benefited greatly from information and communications technologies, the developing world, especially the least developed countries, had been increasingly marginalized by their lack of the resources needed to take advantage of new technologies, even though it was within the reach of the international community, both financially and technologically, to make information and communications technologies available to all. There had nevertheless been some promising developments, which, if properly used, could benefit people on both sides of the digital divide, for example, wireless technology, which was being used to provide Internet access to rural villages in Nepal.

6. He said that the Department of Public Information had a crucial role to play in promoting a global information system. Its strategic communications services increased awareness of and support for key issues. The Internet portal on climate change, the website on counter-terrorism, the News Centre portal and the diversity of languages and services on the United Nations website were concrete examples of the Department's successful efforts to disseminate information about the United Nations.

7. He stressed that the needs of the target audiences must be taken into account. Radio and to a lesser extent television remained important in rural areas of the developing countries and should receive priority. He welcomed the forthcoming new edition of *Basic Facts about the United Nations*, which was important for readers in the developing countries. He also welcomed the Department's focus on youth and partnership with NGOs and the "one laptop per child" initiative, which was of special importance to the developing countries.

8. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library played an important role as the central repository of knowledge about the Organization and he commended it for its training programmes, although they should be scheduled so as to make them more accessible to permanent missions. The Department should also explore ways to include journalists from the developing countries, especially the least developed countries, in United Nations training programmes. The United Nations information centres were important assets in the field, and he commended the centre in

Kathmandu for its work and said it should be strengthened to make it a more efficient regional hub. He said that any rationalization of the information centres in the developing countries should be aimed at strengthening them and should always be based on dialogue with the host countries and regional Member States.

9. Fundamental freedoms and human rights were at the centre of Nepal's new democratic reforms and his Government believed in a vibrant and responsible media. The Interim Constitution guaranteed the right to information and a Right to Information Act had been enacted recently. Furthermore, a National Information Commission was being established that would act as a watchdog.

10. He stressed that the information revolution must lead to equal benefits for all peoples of the world. The information society must be just, inclusive and pro-poor and include a proper system of Internet governance, easier access to technology, technical assistance to developing countries for e-governance and agreement among stakeholders on the way forward. His delegation would work with the international community to that end.

11. **Ms. Link** (Israel) commended the Department of Public Information for its continued improvement of the United Nations website and for its efforts to educate people around the world about the Organization. She also commended it for its impressive work to promote Holocaust remembrance around the world in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/7. The outreach programme on the Holocaust had fulfilled its task in a comprehensive and innovative manner and had expanded its efforts in the past year, developing training seminars on Holocaust remembrance and genocide prevention for national information officers of United Nations information centres.

12. The Department had organized the second annual ceremony for the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust as well as two exhibitions to mark that occasion. The outreach programme had sponsored a concert to promote tolerance, held in the memory of the journalist Daniel Pearl. It would hold a seminar on 8 November 2007 on combating hatred, and had launched an online pedagogical tool to support the development of educational curricula by Member States. The Department's work on Holocaust awareness illustrated the evolving educational role of the Organization and was an inspiring example of cooperation between it and Israel, one that had a positive universal application.

13. Her delegation believed that Member States had an obligation to help the Department tell the story of the United Nations and improve the Organization's image among their respective publics. Accordingly, as the United Nations assumed a larger role in the Middle East, her Government had sought to cooperate with the Organization to educate the Israeli public about its goals, initiatives and values, replacing misconception and suspicion with knowledge and openness. In the previous year several seminars had been organized at universities, with invited representatives of United Nations agencies. She said that Israel, as a multilingual democracy, home of the three great monotheistic religions, was an ideal location for disseminating the United Nations vision and she reiterated her Government's invitation to open an information centre in Israel as a way of promoting dialogue and cooperation in the region.

14. In building their young State, Israelis had overcome many difficulties to become a vibrant democracy and cultural melting pot on the cutting edge of technology, and were eager to share their experience with the international community and immediate neighbours in particular, especially on the issue of bridging the technological and digital divide. The United Nations and the Department of Public Information were intended for just such a purpose: putting aside differences and concentrating on cross-border cooperation.

15. Notwithstanding the admirable work of the Department, she expressed disappointment that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continued to be the only conflict that still had a special information programme, the special information programme on the question of Palestine, which used up precious resources and conveyed a biased and misleading picture. At a time when no funds were available to tell other more pressing stories, by continuing to fund that Programme the Organization was failing to meet its own goal of focusing on priority issues. Her delegation nevertheless would continue to support the work of the Department aimed at disseminating the story of those nations that were united in their desire for peace and prosperity.

16. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) said it was important to ensure that advances in information technology did not widen the digital divide between developed and developing countries. The Department of Public Information (DPI) had a crucial role to play in ensuring that the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies, were available to all, in accordance with the United Nations Millennium Declaration, and in promoting the establishment of a new world information and communication order, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 34/182. The best way to achieve those goals was to improve communications capacities in developing countries, in accordance with the strategy adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at its 1989 General Conference.

17. Since many people in developing countries lacked access to modern means of communication, traditional means should not be overlooked in disseminating United Nations media products. The United Nations information centres played a crucial role in conveying the message of the United Nations to such people, and their activities should be enhanced, particularly in the priority areas identified by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information. DPI should not close information centres or merge them with United Nations field offices without first consulting the host countries, and should continue its activities related to the Palestinian question, such as its special information programme on the question of Palestine.

18. **Mr. Al-Salyani** (Yemen) said that his delegation was grateful to all the DPI personnel who helped to maintain the United Nations information centre in Sana`a, which played a crucial role in advancing United Nations goals in a country undergoing transformation in a region vital to global interests.

19. The Department needed to devote more attention to the dialogue among civilizations, in light of the defamation of certain religions, cultures and civilizations by the media in certain countries. Such defamation increased hatred between nations and produced extremist responses. In that regard, he was deeply concerned by the so-called "Islamo-Fascism Awareness Week" being observed at some universities in the United States. DPI faced great challenges, but could continue to play an important role in promoting United Nations programmes by keeping up with new developments and maintaining a clear vision of its strategic goals.

21. **Ms. Jayasuriya** (Sri Lanka) said that the Department could play an important role in narrowing the digital divide by disseminating information using innovative and creative strategies. However, it was important to prioritize those strategies in order to achieve greater system-wide coherence in addressing such issues as peace and security, climate change, the Millennium Development Goals, counter-terrorism, peacekeeping and human rights. In addition, it was important to develop close partnerships with civil society, the private sector and non-governmental organizations and to continue to use traditional forms of communication as well as new information and communications technologies.

22. The United Nations information centres and services played an important role in disseminating the Organization's message at the grass-roots level. They needed to take advantage of local human resources and languages in order to convey the Organization's message in a format that was easy to understand. It was essential to provide the centres with adequate resources and to develop and update their websites regularly. As the Department promoted a culture of evaluation, it would be useful to have an interactive dialogue with the host countries about the effectiveness of the work done by the United Nations information centres and services.

23. The High-level Dialogue on inter-religious and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace had shown that the Department had a responsibility to promote respect for cultural diversity and understanding among cultures and religions. Her delegation acknowledged the Department's role in promoting peacekeeping operations in both troop-contributing and host countries and noted that it was important to defend the reputation of peacekeepers, who were sometimes the subject of unsubstantiated allegations and who discharged their duties in difficult circumstances.

24. **Mr. Al-Hosani** (United Arab Emirates) said that modern communications tools such as the Internet and satellites were creating an information gap between the developed and the developing countries that lacked sufficient resources to gain access to those tools. That gap was being exploited by certain hegemonic media institutions to marginalize and in some cases distort the

histories, civilizations and creeds of certain peoples. A new world information and communication order was needed, with assistance provided to developing countries to acquire information and communications technology, as was an international code of ethics to establish objective standards and protect media personnel in conflict zones.

25. He expressed satisfaction with the efforts of DPI to enhance its capabilities to help the United Nations confront global threats. Those efforts should include developing language broadcasts and Internet sites in Arabic, alongside the other official languages, strengthening cooperation between DPI and non-governmental organizations, and opening more information centres in developing States. The United Nations needed to fulfil its responsibility, as provided for in the relevant resolutions, to disseminate information on the situation in the Middle East and the situation of Palestinians under Israeli occupation.

26. His country had recently established a Higher Media Council to ensure that its positions on economic, political and social questions were disseminated to the public. It had passed new legislation to address such issues as intellectual property and access to the latest digital technology, with a view to keeping its society connected globally while remaining true to its traditional heritage. International cooperation on those issues would contribute to greater international understanding for generations to come.

27. **Mr. Al-Sarawi** (Kuwait), noting that new developments in communications technology were rapid and continual, commended the efforts of DPI to keep up with them. It was imperative to ensure that media were used for dialogue among all peoples rather than as a tool for imposing one particular culture or ideology on others. DPI should redouble its assistance to developing countries to help close the digital divide. There should be parity among the official languages, including Arabic, in the Department's activities. He praised the cooperation between UNESCO and broadcast networks and news agencies in developing countries. His delegation hoped that DPI would devote greater attention to Middle East issues, in particular those related to the Palestinian people, in accordance with General Assembly resolutions. Kuwait stood ready to work together with the Committee on Information and DPI to increase freedom of the media as long as that did not conflict with Arab and Islamic traditions and values.

28. **Mr. Akasaka** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) said that the growing partnership between DPI and the Committee on Information was a key element in redefining the Department's role in a complex and evolving global media environment. The Department had taken note of the Committee's comments on those areas in which it needed to improve its work. It had also taken note of the requests for additional information or clarifications on specific areas of work and would continue its dialogue with Member States in order to achieve the common goal of a stronger United Nations for a better world.

Draft resolution A on information in the service of humanity (A/62/21, chap. IV)

Draft resolution B on United Nations public information policies and activities (ibid.)

29. **The Chairman** said that the draft resolutions had no financial implications.

30. *Draft resolutions A and B in document A/62/21, chapter IV, were adopted by consensus.*

31. **Mr. Kanaan** (Observer for Palestine), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the statement given by the delegation of Israel had contained many errors and contradictions. The Government of Israel should show its commitment to the Charter, international resolutions and humanitarian law by withdrawing from the territories under its occupation. It should allow the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and establish a Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem in order to establish peace and security in the Middle East. The special information programme on the question of Palestine served an important function because the occupation was the longest in history and Israel was the only Member State classified as an occupying Power.

32. Israel should show its commitment by withdrawing from all the territories it had occupied since 1967, allowing Palestine to become a full State Member of the United Nations. The claim that Israel was a democratic State was contradicted by the facts: Israel was an occupying Power that had carried out acts of military aggression, confiscated property and built a

separation wall. It had brought settlers into the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the occupied Arab territories in contravention of international law. There were over 11,000 Palestinians in jail in Israel. The special information programme on the question of Palestine would thus continue to be necessary until the question of Palestine in all its aspects was resolved.

Agenda item 40: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*continued*) (A/C.4/62/L.4)

Draft decision A/C.4/62/L.4 on the question of Gibraltar

33. *Draft decision A/C.4/62/L.4 was adopted.*

Rights of reply

34. **Mr. Khan Qasuri** (Pakistan), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that, at the 6th meeting of the Committee, the delegation of India had made untenable claims concerning Jammu and Kashmir. In the context of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, the fact that the people of Jammu and Kashmir had been denied their right to self-determination for 60 years was relevant to the Committee's discussions. Jammu and Kashmir was not an integral part of India, nor had it ever been. United Nations resolutions clearly stated that the future of the State of Jammu and Kashmir should be decided through a free and impartial plebiscite conducted under United Nations auspices. Those resolutions had not been implemented, even though their provisions had been agreed on by the Governments of India and Pakistan.

35. Security Council resolution 122 (1957) reaffirmed the provisions of resolution 91 (1951), which stated that any action taken by the Constituent Assembly formed by India in occupied Pakistan would not constitute a disposition of the State in accordance with the principle that the will of the people should be expressed through a free and impartial plebiscite. Pakistan did not need advice from India on self-determination or democracy. Impartial organizations had reported serious violations of the human rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Although Jammu and Kashmir had become an issue of concern worldwide, the Governments of India and Pakistan had agreed to discuss it on a bilateral basis. Pakistan had developed constructive ideas for the discussions but reserved the right to refer the matter to the United Nations as necessary.

36. **Mr. Oraon** (India) said that his Government's position on the question of Jammu and Kashmir was well known and did not need to be repeated. Pakistan would be better served by looking at human rights, self-determination and democracy in its own country. His Government was fully committed to the bilateral talks between the Governments of India and Pakistan.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.